

Representative Richard Roy, Senator Ed Meyer, Members of the Environment Committee, for the record my name is Jeff Barske from the Town of Thompson and also the Thompson Town Clerk by profession, and I am here to testify with respect to SB 85N ACT CONCERNING CAMPGROUND RESERVATIONS AT CERTAIN STATE PARKS.

I have camped at Hammonasset for 57 of my 59 years and consider myself well acquainted with camping law history and DEEP State Park management and interpretation of those laws.

SB 85 seeks to limit a camping family to 21 total camping nights between Memorial Day and Labor Day. This would be a serious restriction to Ct and out of state camping families compared to the DEEP practices of the last 40 years.

When legislation was enacted in the early 70's to open up camp sites to more families it made a lot of sense.

The way that legislation has been interpreted my Shoreline DEEP campground management for the 40 years since 1973, has been to allow campers a maximum stay of 21 nights followed by 5 days away from the park before another camping reservation would be accepted. This system has worked for 40 years. For much of June, the latter part of August and then from Labor Day to the end of the season in early October, campsites are readily available. On July 28th of last year, the Facebook site for Hammonasset heralded "we have 91 campsites available; Come on Down"..

This legislation to limit how many nights a camping family can stay all season to 21 days is a result of complaints that campsites are not available at these parks in core summer periods.

What is important to note is that campsites can be reserved 11 months ahead of time. A family that plans their vacations ahead of time, as most of us do, for holiday trips, family airline trips and any other vacation time away from home, has plenty of time to reserve campsites at these shoreline parks if they plan ahead. The campsites available to reserve around July 4th and the two other long holiday weekends are certainly a limited commodity and I believe the practice of "first come first served" is fair. To legislate camping to only 21 days during the summer is overkill for everyone; especially since anyone visiting the parks in June, late August and September can see for themselves that there are plenty of open sites. Why turn away able and willing campers, willing to reserve sites and pay for them months ahead of time?

All parties agree that CGS 23-16A needs to be amended, as it can be interpreted in several ways; a reasonable way as it has been for 40 years with the 21 day max, 5 day out rule, or conversely, a very restrictive way, as DEEP has recently announced, it wants to limit camping families to 21 days ALL YEAR !

My suggestions are, in order of preference, to amend shoreline camping laws with the following language.

1. Most preferable is to continue to apply the practice of a "21 day maximum one time stay followed by a 5 day period out of the park." On site Camp Management can police those families who abuse the 21 day rule by booking campsites under other family names or making overlapping reservations.

or

2. Amend the current SB 85 proposed language to allow 28 days of camping rather than 21 days between July 1st and Labor Day.

or

3. Maintain the current 21 day maximum stay, 5 day out rule and set aside 10% of campground sites to only be reserved 14 days ahead of the stay; (this would allow families whose plans have changed or have made a quick decision to camp, and have sites available to reserve at the last minute.)

If the DEEP's highly restrictive plans to limit camping families to 21 camping nights all year, or the current suggestion, SB 85, to limit reservations to 21 days from Memorial Day to Labor Day are adopted, many more campsites will remain unused resulting in lower revenue to the state, lost revenue to shoreline businesses, and restrictive access to our two beautiful State Parks which may will push away the State's loyal campers, many of them retired senior citizens.

It is my hope that my testimony along with others testifying today will result in fair and equitable legislation and allow the state to maximize park use and keep our shorelines parks open to all who desire to enjoy the beauty and relaxation of these two wonderful treasures.

To arbitrarily restrict access to these parks to families from Ct and from out of state, willing to pay and reserve campsites months ahead of time, many of them Senior Citizens, when for much of the camping season, sites are readily available, is not what our State Parks are all about. Please keep our Parks open without severe restrictions, for everyone to enjoy .

Jeffrey Barske
Thompson CT.